



# HERBAN FRESH

FROM THE CITY  
TO THE CITY  
FOR

# SOCIAL IMPACT REPORT



# 2022

plenus group inc



food by design



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*This report covers March 2022 to March 2023, our most recent fiscal year.*

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# OUR MISSION

*Herban Fresh was created by PGI Foods in 2019 to offer high quality retail soups tied to a strong social mission. Two percent of each sale from our soups go directly to support urban agriculture initiatives, including community gardens, education, and other activities that improve access to quality foods. In the period of this report, March 2022-March 2023, we've distributed over \$64,000 to non-profit organizations promoting urban agriculture. Since Herban Fresh began, a total of \$141,000 has been distributed to date. Read further to learn about our continuing commitment to the cause of food justice.*

## WELCOME

This year represented our 21st year in business, which is truly amazing. We have come far since we started with 6 employees and \$600,000 in first year sales, but we still have more progress to make. Our hardworking and efficient 150 member team has made it possible for us to continue to grow through the current headwinds facing global economies.



*Joe Jolly, CEO of Plenus Group*

As a food company, we feel an obligation to feed more of our community members, including our team, and to do it well. This means deploying our surplus food where it is needed most. It means more freshly prepared, celebratory meals for the team. And it means more culinary innovations at our food truck for the enjoyment of all. PGI is committed to using its resources to grow our social impact through food.

The Herban Fresh Social Impact Program has been our gateway to embodying our values around food justice and food sovereignty. We truly appreciate the support of our retail partners and all the people who choose to nourish themselves and their family with Herban Fresh soups. Your choice is making a difference. It is an honor to be on your table.

~ Joe Jolly, CEO



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~ **Joe Jolly, CEO**



# SOCIAL IMPACT PARTNERSHIP UPDATE



We launched our Social Impact Partnership in 2021 to formalize our commitment to food justice and food sovereignty. Channeling 2% of sales proceeds to support nonprofits and social innovators who are making an impact in the communities where our Herban Fresh soups are sold, Social Impact Partnerships are our way of giving back.

As Herban Fresh sales grow into new geographical markets, our team works to build connections and relationships with local food justice initiatives to strengthen sustainable agriculture, healthy food access, and nutrition and culinary education. We now have Social Impact Partners in four states. Read on to learn more about our partners, old and new:

## SOCIAL IMPACT PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:



### MILL CITY GROWS, Lowell, MA



*Community gardening in action. Courtesy of Mill City Grows.*

Based in our hometown of Lowell, Mill City Grows is an urban food justice organization that has worked tirelessly for over 10 years to empower Lowell residents by fostering community gardens, distributing locally grown food and bringing food justice education to schools. Over the past year, Mill City Grows distributed over 73,000 lbs of produce to more than 6,500 individuals through various organizations.

Initiatives in 2022 included:

- Maintaining 5 acres of urban farmland with a harvest of over 31,000 lbs.
- Conducting over 3,600 transactions at mobile markets, with a majority of the purchases made using benefits.
- Feeding approximately 700 community members through 190 active garden beds.
- Educating elementary and middle school students through 142 after school classes totaling over 380 hours of instruction.



*Celebrating the Garlic Harvest at Pyne Arts Magnet School, Lowell. Courtesy of Erin Hebert.*



*Serving the community at an indoor mobile market. Courtesy of Mill City Grows.*

# SOCIAL IMPACT PARTNERSHIP UPDATE



## SOCIAL IMPACT PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:



### Homesteads for Hope, Rochester, NY



*Folks working on the member garden beds. Courtesy of Homesteads for Hope.*

**Homesteads for Hope Community Farm**, a 55-acre community farm located in Rochester, NY was the recipient of our 2022 Herban Fresh Farm Fund sweepstakes through our retail partner, Tops Friendly Markets. The farm is designed to be accessible and inclusive for people of all ages and abilities. Here, Nature's classroom is harnessed to serve adults with intellectual and physical disabilities through workforce development classes and programs. The farm is committed to creating a diverse sense of community for all through classes, memberships and social events, which reach over 600 families in the community. The \$5,000 grant from the Herban Fresh Farm Fund is being used to revamp the trellising of 45 member gardens and to improve communication with members. We are delighted to have Homesteads for Hope in our network of Social Impact Partners.

## SOCIAL IMPACT PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:



### Harlem Grown, Harlem, NY



Based in New York City, **Harlem Grown** inspires and empowers young people in the heart of the city to lead healthy and ambitious lives through their hands-on farming and mentorship programs. Through multiple urban gardens and farm sites, Harlem Grown is committed to growing healthy children and sustainable communities.

"In 2022, your support enabled us to serve 11,582 youth across our programming and nourished the bodies of our community with over 200,859 servings of food distributed through our farms. From all of us at Harlem Grown and on behalf of the children we serve, we thank Herban Fresh for your generous support."



*Community youth partaking in cooking demonstrations facilitated by our Mobile Teaching Kitchen. Courtesy of Harlem Grown.*

# HERBAN FRESH UPDATES



2022 was another year of growth for our Herban Fresh brand of soups. We added over 650 new retail locations at chains including Jewel Osco, Shoprite and Foodtown (<https://herbanfreshfoods.com/where-to-buy-store-locator>).

2022 sales are equivalent to over 2 ¼ million servings of delicious soups!

## NON-GMO AND GLUTEN FREE CERTIFICATIONS



We were excited to announce Non-GMO Project verification for six popular vegan soups in the Herban Fresh line. In addition, five of those soups are also certified as Gluten-Free through NSF International. The soups include such popular flavors as **Tomato Cauliflower, Hearty Vegetable, Butternut Squash, Yellow Split Pea, Sweet Potato + Kale and Vegan Chick'n Orzo.**

The certifications underscore our commitment to giving customers the most reliable information on the soups and the sourcing of ingredients. Both the Non-GMO and Gluten-Free certifications are rigorously tested, independently verified programs from trusted organizations.

## 2022 COMMUNITY BATCH



This year we took a different approach with our community batch. Instead of using surplus produce from our community partners, we decided to stay internal and make a delicious, nourishing, soup with in-house ingredients that otherwise had no home. While we routinely send close to code ingredients and organic waste to a local farm, this year we decided on a “warehouse rescue” and used fennel, beans, pasta, squash and tomatoes to make a Hearty Tomato and Squash Soup which we donated to Mill City

Grows and The Daily Table with happy hearts and a decluttered warehouse!

## Top 10 Herban Fresh Retailers

- 1  ShopRite
- 2  Jewel Osco
- 3  Tops Friendly Market
- 4  Acme Markets
- 5  The Fresh Market
- 6  Big Y
- 7  Shaw's
- 8  Safeway
- 9  Whole Foods
- 10  Market Basket

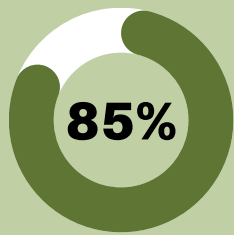


# NEWS FROM PLENUS GROUP INC. HQ



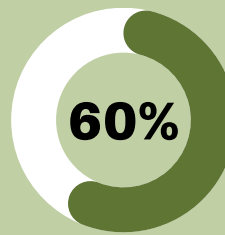
On a Tuesday morning in April, we set up with some giant sticky notes and a set of questions for our staff regarding food sovereignty. We wanted to get a sense of how our staff engages with the food we make and serve on site.

In the fruitful, engaging conversations that followed, we confirmed that our staff highly values home-cooked meals. Given that we have very talented chefs on our team who make excellent grub, we weren't surprised to hear that staff prefer on-site prepared food to catered meals when we host employee events. Takeaways from the conversations also revealed the following:



*of employees surveyed take product home from our PGI Free Fridge to share with friends and family.*

## PGI Free Fridge



*of employees surveyed regularly eat the PGI Daily Soup, where we serve the best of the previous day's production—hot all day!*

## PGI Daily Soup



And a clear winner for the employee's favorite soup...**Beef Chili!**





# EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT SPOTLIGHT



Not only does our team show up to make great food every day, they also inspire us in how they practice our shared values of food sovereignty and sustainability. This year, we'd like to share two stories of team members who have gone above and beyond to feed our community.

**Jamie Crane** is one of our dedicated Foodservice salespeople, who has been with us since the beginning. The Herban Fresh mission of supporting urban agriculture has always resonated with him since he has a passion for his own home-grown produce. One of his dreams has always been to expand from his backyard plot to a community garden space so when he saw that Melita Farms Community Garden in his hometown of Methuen,



MA had some spots available he jumped at the opportunity. He spent the spring planting his beds with tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, zucchinis, and squash galore and enjoyed working among likeminded green thumbs in the garden. Jamie and some of his new friends also began to share their surplus with one another. But what to do when everyone's pantries are full? Jamie and his new farmer friends started making outrageously fresh salads and bringing them down to a parking garage in Lawrence where **The Movement Family** (<https://www.themovementfamily.org/about/>) hosts dinners for those in need. Gardening brings Jamie community, and his community brings the freshest food to the Lawrence community. We cannot wait to see this year's impact from Jamie and Melita Farms.



**Kaitlyn Jolly** runs The Jolly Lobster, our new on-site food trailer. She is one of the newest members of our team and her joy and enthusiasm for feeding people is an inspiration. She relishes preparing lobster rolls and gourmet loaded hot dogs for our customers. Our team members are some of her most loyal customers, who she spoils with off menu items like breakfast tacos and Colombian style arepas. More importantly, Kaitlyn made a commitment that no food would go to waste at the end of the day. As part of her closing duties, she packs up

and labels leftover hot food and drives it to the **Lowell Transitional Center**, our local shelter, to deliver to folks who have lined up outside waiting for an open bed. When people see her car, they get happy knowing that hot, high quality, freshly prepared food is on the way. A few regulars let the newer folks know the drill, take stock of the offerings, and organize to make sure everyone gets not only something, but what they want. Thank you, Kaitlyn and the residents of Lowell Transitional Center for being our teachers!



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